

## Modern Tactics.

[By Capt. H. R. Gall—From Illustrated Naval and Military Magazine.]

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THIS important operation fell to the lot of the left wing, composed of the VIIIth corps, under Lieut.-General Radetsky. In addition to the Caucasian brigade and a regiment of Don Cossacks, the XIth cavalry division was placed under the orders of the VIIIth corps commander (his own cavalry division having been detached to form part of the cavalry operating in front of the Russian advance).

On the morning of the 24th of April General Radetsky crossed the frontier at the village of Bestomak, and late that evening (24th April) his advanced guard, consisting of XIth cavalry division, Caucasian brigade, one regiment of Don Cossacks, and all the mountain guns, after a ride of sixty-five miles reached the Sereth river, and took possession of the railway bridge near Galatz, on the Danube.

The Russian cavalry (1877) was armed with the short Berdan rifle and bayonet, a weapon almost equal to any rifle the Turks possessed, and General Radetsky considered that his advanced guard was capable of holding its own against whatever Turkish troops they might have to encounter until he came up with the infantry. On several occasions during this war Russian cavalry, dismounted, successfully attacked Turkish infantry.

History repeats itself; and dismounted dragoons are likely once more to play a great role in the campaigns of the future. In Continental armies it seems to be the accepted opinion that dragoons are more generally serviceable and less expensive in the long run than mounted infantry. The difficulty of obtaining trained horses in sufficient numbers will always be a serious drawback to the latter.

### Chapter IV.—OUTPOSTS.

The principles on which outpost duties are based are simple and easily defined; but the conditions under which these principles have to be applied are so entirely dependent on circumstances as to preclude any detailed rules being laid down, for fear that the too strict observance of them might hinder the prompt and independent action which officers and men on outpost duty are especially liable to be called upon to exercise.

The probabilities are that no two men look upon a piece of country from quite the same point of view, and the importance of a post is often overrated by the individual who is actually responsible for its safety. Herein lies one of the great dangers to be guarded against, viz., the subordination of the general aim and object in view to the local possibilities of certain portions of the general outpost line.

After reconnoitring the ground, the first thing to impress upon the troops furnishing the outposts is their mission.

Normally the mission of outposts is to prevent the enemy getting within artillery range of the position they are covering until the troops composing the army, whose repose they are guarding, have had time to get under arms, march to, and satisfactorily occupy, their respective stations.

The army once in position and ready to give battle, the sooner the outposts are withdrawn the better, as their presence clouds the fire of the position, while it does not materially aid its defenders to repel the attack.

Outposts if attacked are nearly certain to be greatly outnumbered, and any protracted resistance beyond that already indicated is an unnecessary sacrifice of life; nevertheless, outposts must at all times endeavour to discriminate between a general advance of the enemy to attack, and a feint, or reconnaissance in force; in the latter case it would be their duty to prevent the enemy, if possible, from gaining information regarding the general position, and they should only retire before rapidly increasing numbers, which would indicate that the enemy was being briskly reinforced, and might turn his operations into a real attack supported by his main body.

It sometimes happens that for strategical considerations, or owing to unforeseen circumstances, such for instance as the unexpected reinforcement of the enemy's main body, that the commander of an army deems it expedient to retire without giving battle. In such an event the outposts might be called upon to make a determined and prolonged resistance; but they would then virtually become a rear guard, and their tactics would be no longer those of outposts.

#### *Distance of Main Resistance-line from the Position the Outposts are covering.*

Except under the abnormal circumstances of a column being cut off from its base, and liable to be attacked on all sides—what the French call “a column in the air”—outposts cover the front, and overlap the exposed flank or flanks of the position they are protecting.

If the main resistance-line of the outposts is about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  miles from the position, this admits of their retiring fighting over one mile of country before the enemy can get within shelling range of its defenders.

One mile properly defended ought, under ordinary circumstances, to ensure about an hour's delay, and the supposition is that in the meantime the general in the rear will have time to get his troops into position.

If a longer delay is necessary, the outposts may be strengthened, but should rarely be farther advanced. To retreat for more than a mile fighting against vastly superior numbers, even with highly trained and disciplined troops, is a dangerous and difficult operation.

The usual reserve, numbering about one-third of the outposts, ought as a rule to be sufficient to meet the requirements of any extraordinary delay beyond the hour above specified. Outposts should rarely exceed about one-sixth of the whole force, their object being to afford rest as well as security to the bulk of the army of which they are a portion.

If owing to the accidents of ground or any other cause a commander cannot encamp his troops within an hour's reach of all vital parts of his position, it is better for him to bivouac upon his fighting ground. This entails encumbering it more or less with his trains and the impedimenta inseparable from an army, and should always be avoided as far as circumstances will admit.

The main resistance line of the outposts should therefore, as a general rule, be posted about one hour's fighting beyond shelling distance of the position.

An hour's fighting is normally represented by a mile, but the actual distance must be decided on the spot, and will vary considerably with the nature of the country that the outposts have to retire over. If favourable for defence, half a mile might be deemed ample; but, for the reasons above stated, it should rarely exceed a mile, owing to the difficulty of withdrawing all portions of the outpost line in concert, and the danger of fractions being isolated and cut off if posted too far away from the main position.

#### *Details of Outpost Duties.*

The Field Exercise is so clear and explicit regarding the manner in which outpost duties are to be performed, the sub-division of outposts, &c., that any attempt at explanation is superfluous, and the student, if he has not already made himself thoroughly acquainted with the system in all its details, as laid down in the drill book for his guidance, is recommended to do so by a careful study of Section 3, Part VI. of the Field Exercise, which is divided under seventeen heads, viz.:—1. General Principles. 2. Force to be employed. 3. Selection of force for outpost duty. 4. Ground to be pointed out. 5. Composition of outposts. 6. Posting of outposts. 7. Sentries. 8. The night or patrol system. 9. Piquets. 10. Points to be borne in mind by officers commanding piquets. 11. Supports. 12. Reserves. 13. Artillery. 14. Flags of truce. 15. No compliments to be paid. 16. Instructions for a battalion practising outposts. 17. The application of army-signalling to outpost duties.

Of these, No. 11, “Supports,” runs as follows:—

“Supports should consist of one or more companies of the same battalion that furnishes the piquets. It is not necessary to have a separate support for each piquet; on the contrary, there should be only one support to each group of two or three piquets; but the support should be about equal in strength to the aggregate of the piquets to which it is linked.”

This paragraph is open to the serious objection that it is not in accordance with the generally accepted principle of companies furnishing their own supports and avoiding, as far as possible, all unnecessary mixing up.

A company of say 100 men may furnish two small piquets of 25 each, or one strong one of 50 men (it is seldom that a piquet need be more than 50 strong). In either of these cases, “which seem to cover all the piquet requirements of outposts,” there is apparently no reason why each piquet should not be supported by men of its own company; thus avoiding all confusion and changing commanders during the most critical time when the outposts become actually and more or less seriously engaged.

In the Field Exercise “Attack Formation,” all mixing up of companies is prohibited, and any formation of attack that involves the mixing up of companies finds no favour at the Horse Guards.

This is in practice opposed to the experience of recent continental wars.

The Prussians not only mix up their companies, which are double the strength of ours, but freely admit that battalions, brigades, and divisions are all liable to be mixed up.

The Russians in 1877-78 experienced the same difficulties, and acknowledge the impossibility of keeping troops from mixing in modern attack formations.

The English Field Exercise alone enforces on parade what is generally acknowledged on the Continent to be an impossibility in the attack; while in the defence where it is feasible, and especially in outpost duties, the Field Exercise lays down as a general principle that companies are not to form their own supports.

At all times unity of command is most desirable; but where it is difficult, if not impossible, it is advocated in the Field Exercise, and where it is easy and practicable it is ignored when it is not prohibited.

However, the Field Exercise says that “supports should consist of one or more companies of the battalion that furnishes the piquets.” And as far as possible the spirit of the regulations must be carried out. Incidentally it is here pointed out that the advantage secured to a piquet falling back on, or being reinforced by, a support furnished from its own company, under its own officers and non-commissioned officers, preparatory to fighting their way back on to the reserves and the position covered, appears to have been overlooked.

It is laid down that the supports are, as a rule, to be equal in strength to the piquets, and again that piquets should rarely number more than 50 men (although a company of the regular English army in peace time at home rarely numbers 50 men on instruction parades). The object of all training and drill is to prepare troops for war, when companies would number about 100 men, and there is no reason why on outpost duty companies should be mixed up until the reserves are called into requisition.

There are three systems of outpost duty.

1. The Cordon System.
2. The Patrol.
3. The Detached Post or Blockhouse system.

The two former are generally recognized in the English army, although the last-mentioned was chiefly adopted in Afghanistan.

The cordon system consists of a chain of sentries furnished by piquets, with supports and sometimes reserves in rear of them. It guards against individuals creeping through, and is applicable only to the day-time.

At night the cordon system gives place to the patrol, when the sentries are posted on the roads and main approaches, and their piquets are moved up close to them.

It is a common error to suppose that sentries are always drawn in closer at night; on the contrary, they frequently have to be slightly advanced.

The patrol system is based on the assumption that at night an enemy will only approach by the roads and main avenues of approach in sufficient force to attack. The intervening country between the sentries is watched by patrols sent out from the piquets, and also, if necessary, from the supports.

(To be Continued.)